

# WOMEN ARTS QUARTERLY JOURNAL

Volume 7 • Issue 2



\$5.95



0 74470 26836

# WOMENARTS QUARTERLY JOURNAL

**Senior Editor**  
Dr. Barbara Harbach

**Managing Editor**  
Lauren Wiser

**Associate Editors**  
Emily Grise and Sarah "Jonesey" Johnson

**Assistant Editors**  
Jennifer Jackson Berry, Robert Stevenson, and Victoria Walls

**Layout and Design**  
Lauren Wiser

**Web Editor**  
Lauren Wiser

**Editorial Board**  
Kelli Allen, Dr. Sally Barr Ebest,  
Dr. Thomas Erdmann, Dr. Carole Harris,  
Dr. Cynthia Green Libby, Joshua Smith, Terry Suhre,  
Dr. Diane Touliatos, Mary Troy, and Dr. Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi

*WomenArts Quarterly Journal* is peer-reviewed and published at the University of Missouri-St. Louis as an initiative of the Women in the Arts organization. The editors invite submissions of unpublished fiction, poetry, essays, visual art, interviews, and reviews by women creators in the fields of music, fiction, poetry, drama, dance, performance art, and visual art.

Visit [www.vivacepress.com/guidelines](http://www.vivacepress.com/guidelines) for submission guidelines and [www.womeninthearts.submittable.com/submit](http://www.womeninthearts.submittable.com/submit) to submit.

Annual Subscription Rates: \$30.00 for individuals (domestic);  
\$45.00 for institutions (domestic);  
\$5.95 for single issues.

*WomenArts Quarterly Journal*  
University of Missouri-St. Louis  
153 JC Penney Building  
One University Blvd.  
St. Louis, MO 63121

Copyright © 2017 by Vivace Press  
All rights revert to author upon publication.  
[www.vivacepress.com/waq](http://www.vivacepress.com/waq)



# CONTENTS

Volume 7 ♦ Issue 2

Review

- Jonesey Johnson, associate editor  
*Independent City*, JR Tappenden.....3

Poetry

- Mary Chi-Whi Kim  
"Unwringing the Bell".....9  
Nina Bennett  
"Old Times".....10  
Susan Flynn  
"Twenty-Seventh Anniversary".....11  
Tara Stringfellow  
"sonnets for nisha".....12  
"joan".....13  
Lana Bella  
"Berthe de Joux".....14

Essay

- Melanie McCabe  
"The Bodies That Held Us".....17

Art

- Laurie Goodhart  
*Aphrodite Calls To Pele*.....27  
*Perirrhanterion, Night Field*.....28  
*Perirrhanterion, Gamboge*.....29  
*Pink Pitcher With Penguins*.....30  
*Water*.....31  
*Bronze Libation Vessel*.....32  
*Terpsichore*.....33  
*White Vessel With Dancing Figures*.....34  
*Three Greek Vases*.....35  
*Small Figure Beholds Aphrodite*.....36

Fiction

- JA Field  
"The Air Was Not Soft Enough".....39

- Contributors.....52

Cover Image:  
*Perirrhanterion, Night Field*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2015, 40 x 30  
oil on canvas

R

E

V

I

E

W

# INDEPENDENT CITY

JR Tappenden

(Wells College Press, 2016)

*So much of the matter / is in the margins*

from "Learning to Float," *Independent City*

There is no map that will lead a new resident of any city through the vagaries of its history. No ghost sign or walk through an old neighborhood that will tell her the stories she needs to know to know the stories she sees. JR Tappenden's chapbook, *Independent City*, speaks to the slow challenge of learning a city not of your birth. This entirely handcrafted work offers its readers more than a travelogue through a new set of past facts. There be ghosts here, and some of them are alive.

JR Tappenden was the winner of the 2016 Wells College Press Chapbook Competition. Her own project, Architrave Press, publishes small batches of letterpress broadsides. Poems are individually typeset in ways designed to complement the poem, and are just gorgeous. Architrave's website ([architravepress.com](http://architravepress.com)) offers a search feature that allows readers to find poems to fit a mood, not simply a reading requirement. The chapbook that Wells Book Arts Center designed and printed elegantly reflects Tappenden's understanding of typography, her appreciation for deliberate craft work, and her love of poetry.

A wood engraving by Wesley Bates offers what appears to be a simple pastoral—an image that becomes more and more layered with every viewing. Here are the bones from "Body Farm," there the starlings from "Flock," here the "Mound City" mounds and coneflowers. In the back sits St. Louis, almost unrecognizable without its Arch unless you have learned the shapes of buildings and their places in the steps of the city away from the river, away from itself, and back again.

St. Louis is a city on water. In Tappenden's poems, water is ever-present, whether unremarked though acknowledged, or seen in relief along boundaries—its liquid properties showing in ripples, silt, heaving, and the pinpoint focus of directional shifts. In "Riparian," Tappenden charts a course of presence, of seeing more than lines of direction: "For every rising / stream, an exposed cottonwood root. For / every exposure, a rock held close. For each / rock, a cloak of moss." There is connection without causation, an eye that keeps context just outside the spotlight of her storytelling.

There are thousands of square acres of green space in St. Louis. Much of that space is managed, presented, and purposeful. Of course, that is not all. Here green spaces can be scars, blocks blocked off with pots, shut in behind gates, the consequences of decades of racist urban development and

housing segregation. In "Mound City," we are shown "the house-less bones / of overgrown foundations dot abandoned blocks, / one grass dome added to another / until they're seamed back to prairie." To suggest that there is no life in those spaces, though, is to deny the life around them:

*Study how the streets divide  
and reunite, how a dead end fills  
with garbage like a tub, unattended, the cold tap  
wide open. Then you'll know where to cut  
and how to avoid a scar. You'll know  
when a graft is right for the lot between  
the bakery and the cleaners. The red brick  
dust will wash away in rivulets and traffic  
will resume its scour.*

from "The Teraphim Instruct their Surgeon"

Independent cities are rare. The term refers to a city that is not encompassed within a county. Like Carson City, Nevada and Baltimore, Maryland, we exist independent of a county government. The marks that divide are less physical than they once were, but the division exists in language and habits of use. Reading these poems over and again, I could not avoid other evidences of time: "[Not water but memories of water] nested concentric, / one to another, accumulated" in "Trees for the Forest"; "The line of a front walk can still be read / in its echo: a gardener's coneflower, the red earth / of a brick path left melting back to clay" in "Mound City"; and the barren corner of "Historicity / 13th & Lafayette": "Unknown something keeps / nothing happening on this corner Nothing / but air and / weeds seeding themselves."

Tappenden sees the red bricks that built this city and remembers the people who did it. She writes of the cemetery under the football field at Roosevelt High. "These are the backs of the bricklayers – nameless / laborers piling up like unfinished houses," lying with those who died from cholera—"Graves unhinge, unmoored / beneath the playing feet of boys / cusping manhood." To learn St. Louis is to learn that history has weight, from before and beyond. It is to learn to read windowsills and memories. As she observes in "Body Farm": "Even a dead man is alive in his decomposing / [ . . . ] Still, this body's / former border can be read in how the ground rises, / how the grass thickens and shines in the rain."

Through it all is a speaker, a voice telling these stories, contemplating these realities and making decisions about what to do next. We are given a shape like the building of a house, or of a life. The speaker observes, begins to question, sees connections and histories and possibilities. There is nothing here that is extinct, though there is much that is endangered. In the last poems, Tappenden turns to the world of birds, a "Peregrine":

*keeping her wings fully fingered,  
to know the particles of coal ash  
and woodsmoke escaped from electric  
plants and hearthstones, to know  
the crystals of ice born around them,  
a dirty snow, all of a dissipation  
to be ridden as it is,  
[ . . . ]  
motes disturbed  
and re-silted in a growing  
delta, a new country.*

These poems challenge me to love my city better, to look harder, to spend more time with its time, and to believe that love can sustain.

—Jonesey Johnson, associate editor

P  
O  
E  
T  
R  
Y

## UNWRINGING THE BELL

The bell in my father's house has swallowed its tongue.  
It swings and swings but cannot sing.  
No hallowed sound echoes from the empty shell.  
The bell in my father's house has swallowed its tongue.

Black swallows swarm the tower, trampling his crumbs.  
Whether they enter heaven or hell,  
no one can tell, no one will tell.  
Black swallows swarm the tower, trampling his crumbs.

The bell in my father's house must be unstrung.  
A noose has rendered it dumb.  
Let it swing, let it ring,  
from a new house. Hallowed be my tongue.

## OLD TIMES

I am a hyphen here, a semicolon when needed,  
a means of joining.

An antediluvian era,  
folding family sheets, my arms outstretched,  
another daughter at the table.

I revel in the low tide as sharp seashells comb my toes,  
a scolding to watch myself.

Your judgments drown me out:  
the roaring, the sea at your back.  
My capitulation swallows me whole.  
I am Jonah in your mouth.

## TWENTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY

you shuffle through our morning  
slippers across our kitchen floor  
slight limp, stiff back, furrowed forehead  
how you let me know—a bad pain day

out our kitchen window  
winter has hushed the roses  
deep in their roots  
all flowers remember the sun

our first many years together  
I never thought  
*someday I won't have you*

these days  
this day  
every day

I bow  
to our accumulation of seasons  
touch my forehead  
to the still-gathering light

## SONNETS FOR NISHA

when i call you cryin from work's parking garage  
from the floor of my closet in some fetal position  
because when i walked into my condo lobby  
a neighbor asked if i was a maid  
because when i close a deal early  
folk ask if i reallly completed this task all by myself  
when i call you cryin you answer through sobs  
i can still hear you sippin your syrah  
pulling on a virginia slim your stuart weitzmans  
scattered across your hardwood  
you drink and smoke and let me cry  
then ask  
you done, bitch?  
at least we ain't pickin cotton

you kaleidoscope me  
perspective me  
i want to end this poem like our phone calls  
but i can see you in your loft apartment  
rollin you eyes smokin askin  
you think two negro women  
chained together in a field  
pickin cotton said i love you?

you right again  
they prolly looked, locked  
brown amber eye to brown amber eye  
saw allllll the way back to creation  
saw the hand of God  
and even that was brown

## JOAN

i can't prove God but i know you  
your breastplate your cropped hair  
i imagine you smelled like wild lavender

my mama gave me a pendant  
with your face etched in pewter  
*don't ever let a man call you crazy*  
she said pressing you into my palm

joan they are killing black children  
i fear for my very womb where do we go  
when a country has betrayed us

my mama can't garden, a crime for a southerner  
she crosses herself, points to a spot  
north purple dark under a magnolia  
*look, she says, wild lavender grows*

## BERTHE DE JOUX

after *The Poison Artist* by Jonathan Moore

In this late hour, there are no stars.  
Alone now, the balcony heralds my  
deep hunger beneath an awning of  
rolling fog where earth and sky  
are the same.

My fingers coil the stem of a Pontarlier  
glass filled with froth of sugary milky  
white absinthe; lips nurse spices of  
anise and wormwood, secrets gulped  
down pharynx shuddering with chills.

A lost evening when a narrow space  
distorts me quicker, a little darker,  
more by way of what it conceals, than  
how it shakes my heart's cathedral  
letting sadness off its long leash.

E

S

S

A

Y

# THE BODIES THAT HELD US

Melanie McCabe

*Some names in this essay have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.*

Mr. Cavallo's voice droned through the Psychology classroom that spring day in 1974, detailing the differences between normal and abnormal adolescent development. "It's normal for teenagers to struggle with identity issues, with trying to figure out who they are and what they want to become. Physical movements at this age can be awkward, as this is a period of rapid growth and teens are learning to become situated in their bodies."

I doodled on my page of notes, half-listening, but with one ear tipped and straining toward the open door that led to the hallway.

"Teens may have worries or confusion over whether they fit in or are normal." Mr. Cavallo looked down at his own notes and then dropped his voice, as though imparting a secret he did not want anyone outside that room to reveal. "They are developing sexually and beginning to become curious about sexual matters."

Beginning? I smirked and looked across the aisle to my best friend, Mary Beth. She stifled a laugh behind her hand. She, too, was listening for sounds out in the hallway, though I could see at a glance that her notes were better, more thorough than mine. There were no doodles at all on her paper.

"However, it is not normal to act out in a sexual manner," he continued. "To act aggressively, to show a disinterest in school, to smoke or drink or use drugs."

Suddenly, from outside the room, I detected a faint but distinct stirring of the air. Movement. A rhythmic beating. A rising hum of voices, cries, shouts. My eyes darted to Mary Beth. She had heard it, too. I looked around the room. My classmates were also turning toward the hall. A few had risen from their seats.

Mr. Cavallo seemed unaware he had now totally lost his audience. "It is normal for teens to seek role models, to turn to those they can look up to, but it is abnormal when this search leads them to emulate those who engage in aberrant, antisocial behaviors."

The sounds from the hallway were now much louder. The unmistakable slapping of bare feet across a hard floor. Hoots. Whistles. Cries of "Yeah!", "Oh my God," "Here they come!" I couldn't restrain myself a second longer. Apparently neither could my peers as we leapt to our feet and ran to have a look. I was fortunate in having a desk near the doorway, and so

had a front-row view of what we had all been waiting for. Others less well-positioned pushed against me from behind, jostled me, leaned heavily on my shoulders, exhaled against the back of my neck.

"What are you all doing?" Mr. Cavallo demanded. "Get back into your seats this minute."

I could see them now as they ran toward me down the long center hallway of the school, an oncoming stampede of naked flesh, flashing elbows and thighs, revealed mysteries. We had heard that a group of kids from the alternative high school, what was sometimes called Hippie High, were going to streak the halls of stodgy and traditional Washington-Lee. I knew all of them—Gary, Richard, Jim, Andrew, Mimi, Dana, and Justin—but my eyes focused on Justin, running, as I knew he would be, at the front of the pack.

How many times had I stared at that face in the long-ago days of eighth grade math class, coveting his smile, his attention, and receiving so little of it? He had hidden himself then in an oversized green Army jacket, his body unknown, a puzzle I could not solve. Now here before me was the answer and I had only to look to compute it. It was effortless and thrilling—like having someone slip you all the correct responses on a test that you had feared you would fail.

I had seen precious little in the way of naked males in my life. A boy in a plywood clubhouse when I was eight, and to whom I had paid a quarter for the privilege. My father once, startled as he came out of a hotel bathroom. And the year before, in tenth grade, an exhibitionist that Mary Beth and I had encountered in the deep green stillness at the center of Lacey Woods. But this was different. Here was a boy I knew, a boy I had once dreamed about and longed for, and as he whizzed past me, I wished I could stop time. Slow down the film so that I could take in what was incomprehensible. Unknowable. Never mine.

Behind me, my classmates whooped and cheered and laughed with that pure glee born of defiance. Mr. Cavallo was beside himself with consternation, baffled by his sudden loss of power. "What is going on out there? Sit down—all of you!"

The streakers had passed our room, but no one seemed willing to return to their hard wooden seat. A few students left the classroom, running behind the naked as they disappeared from view. Others darted to the windows to see if the runners could be spotted as they exited the building. I stood in a kind of daze, marveling at what had just occurred. The audacity of it. The bravery. To be so at ease inside one's body that one could shed its camouflage and offer it up fearlessly to hundreds of eyes.

I had no such courage. I lived as small as I could and suspected that I was unlovable. I couldn't imagine stripping, running, making myself a spectacle. In fact, I had spent much of the previous winter trying to make at least a part of myself disappear.

One day at lunch in January of tenth grade, my friend Sofia's boyfriend, Jim, had reached out and laid his hand gently, proprietarily, on her belly. "I like it right here," he said, looking up at her. "It's soft and warm and round."

I was suddenly embarrassed to be standing there. It was an intimate gesture, and even to my inexperienced eyes, an act of love.

But Sofia did not take it as such. Later that day, she fumed to me, "He was telling me that I'm fat."

"Oh, no," I said. "I really don't think so. You're not fat at all!"

And I meant it. She was not even remotely overweight. What she was, instead, was voluptuous. Curvy and womanly. And she had been so for a long time, even back in seventh grade when the rest of us were still skinny, flat-chested, awkward children.

"I need to go on a diet," she said. "Right away. Starting tonight."

I shrugged. "You really don't need to."

"I do."

"Well," I said, "I guess if you're going to go on a diet, I will, too. I've put on twenty pounds since last year."

And I had. My childlike body had changed dramatically in the summer between eighth and ninth grades. But my childhood eating habits had stayed the same. When I was a girl, I could eat whatever I wanted and remain the bony, knobby stick figure I'd always been, but by tenth grade, the cheeseburgers, fries, milkshakes, and late-night Oreos were beginning to make themselves known. I had gone up two sizes in clothing. I didn't like the way that I looked.

I felt then as though my body was all that I had. I was not pretty. I carried with me everywhere numerous hurts, stings, assaults to my ego, and they inevitably colored the self that I saw when I looked into the mirror. In eighth grade, when the yearbooks had come out, several boys in my math class had gone through the pictures and given each girl a letter grade. I was right in front of them while they loudly argued over whether I rated a D or an E. In ninth grade, when I had come home from the optometrist's wearing my new glasses, my father had groaned to my mother, "No boy will ever look at her now." And outside a dance that very year, I had stood talking to a boy I liked when Anna Genacopolos, the most gorgeous girl in the school, walked by in her tight jeans and leather jacket, her long black hair blowing behind her. The boy let out a deep and long animal moan, as though he were in pain. "FOX-y lady," he called out after her. She turned ever so slightly so that he could see her raised chin, her half-smile, and then she tossed her hair dramatically over her shoulder. When I walked away from him, he never even noticed that I was gone.

I knew what it was to be a cipher. A nothing. A zero. And so I thought to myself, maybe this crazy idea of Sofia's might actually be a good thing.

Every day at lunch, we put the smells and the temptations of the cafeteria far behind us. We walked down the hall to a lounge near the Child Development classroom, where there was a plush blue carpet, an upholstered sofa, and brocaded chairs. I took out my half-sandwich of turkey and my Granny Smith apple, and ate them as slowly as possible. Sofia took out only an apple.

"Is that all you're going to have?" I asked her on the first day of the diet.

"I'll make up for it at dinner," she said. "It's easier just to grab an apple in the morning. I don't have time to make a sandwich."

The winter months passed. I noted my progress with excitement each time I stepped on the bathroom scale. My "fat jeans" were so loose I had to tug to keep them up. I was slipping back into my former clothing. By April, I went out with the money I'd earned from my job at the library and bought a couple of pretty spring dresses. I couldn't wait for the first really warm day to wear one. I fantasized at night as I lay in bed what people would say—what boys would say—and how they would look at me.

The day I wore the light green dress to school, the weatherman was predicting an unseasonable high of eighty degrees. My legs were bare and cocoa-buttered, and I wore sandals with a heel. I felt pretty. Worthy. Sofia and Mary Beth were also wearing new spring dresses. It was during a break between classes, and Mary Beth and I walked side-by-side behind Sofia up one of the narrow staircases to the second floor.

As I climbed, I focused straight ahead of me at the back of Sofia's exposed legs. I drew in my breath in sudden alarm, and looked quickly at Mary Beth to see if she saw what I did. She looked back at me, the same horror on her face as on my own. Sofia's legs were nothing but bones covered by a frail layer of skin. I looked at her arms, seeing them for the first time all winter. Now, unhidden by bulky sweaters, I saw that they, too, were skeletal.

I had never seen anyone look like this, outside of a photograph of an Auschwitz prisoner.

I didn't understand what had occurred, or how I had not noticed what was happening to Sofia. How and why had she let herself get like this? Certainly she must know that she looked painfully thin. Frightening. Even ill.

Sofia was in my next class with me, and after the teacher began his lecture, I furtively scribbled a note and passed it over to her when the teacher's back was turned.

"How much weight have you lost?" I asked.

She scribbled back: "Not enough. I still need to lose about ten more pounds."

I stared at the words on the paper, confused. What in God's name was she thinking? Hadn't she looked in a mirror? Hadn't her parents or one of her sisters seen what she had been hiding so effectively at school?

"I think you've lost enough," I wrote back. "Maybe too much."

She looked at me as though I was a sadly misguided child and shook her head. The note passing was over.

My beautiful friend had begun to vanish, to become a ghost, a phantom who moved, nearly unrecognizably, inside of her bones. Mary Beth and I were worried, and conferred after school with Jim. He, too, was concerned.

None of us at that time had ever heard of anorexia. This was long before Karen Carpenter's death. Before the public awareness campaign began, before a bumper crop of TV movies were hustled off of Hollywood's assembly line, before health classes included anorexia in the curriculum. None of us knew what had caused her to lose all perspective about her body.

Every day, she seemed to grow farther and farther away from me. She seemed shut off in a world of her own making, suspicious of anyone who mentioned her body, nursing grudges and frequently angry at Jim. Whatever he did, she found fault with. He would try to reach out to her, to touch her, and she would snap at him, question his motives. Daily, she wrote me notes in which she examined whatever she perceived to be his latest transgression. I could see him begin to pull away from her. She could see it, too, and it only seemed to make her lash out at him all the more. It was a relentless cycle, and it was going nowhere good.

My own diet was a great success. Wearing an entirely new wardrobe, I moved through that spring and into summer like someone who had been invisible and could now, suddenly, be seen. Boys who had ignored me previously spoke to me, laughed with me, considered me worthy of their fledgling flirting skills.

I had dates. Attention. Power. I knew the heady joy of male eyes as I swung my hips down the hall. I was still not pretty, but I learned soon enough that "pretty" was not the only viable currency in an economy built wholly on desire. The rules of this system were impossible to calculate accurately. What was money in the bank with one boy was an unwanted commodity to another. Merely a cut-rate item for the budget table. Still, I found that for every few boys who found me a tawdry item on the sale rack, there was at least one who wanted me wholesale.

I came to terms with who I was, and I liked the body I was in. But never in my wildest dreams would I have stripped and run naked down the middle of the school. All of those eyes. All of that judgment. It was beyond my comprehension—and my inability to wrap my mind around

the astonishing audacity of it all made what happened to poor Dana even more horrible—more mesmerizing. In one split-second wrong decision, she became a target. She became a legend. She became the next morning's chuckle on the Metro page of the *Washington Post*.

Dana hadn't planned to streak with the rest of the group. She had gone along to watch, and at the last minute, caught up in the thrill and the excitement, had peeled off her clothes and taken off running behind the others. They had had a good head start and she was running hard to catch up to them. Far ahead, she could see as one of the boys, Andrew, running in only his cowboy boots, slipped on a step, almost fell, and then righted himself.

And then, for some reason that none of us ever understood, she turned left when she should have kept running forward. Forward to the Stafford Street entrance to the school, forward to the waiting getaway car. Once out in the sunlight, alone, in the middle of the teacher parking lot, Dana might as well have been wielding a megaphone, might as well have been standing in the hot white spotlight of center stage in a darkened theatre.

A crowd of gawking, transfixed teenaged boys gathered around her as she stood there, unmoving, unsure of what to do next. The car she was waiting for was not there, and none of her unclad collaborators were anywhere in sight.

The boys closed in on her. Not one dared to reach out his hand and touch her, but the steady gazes, the slowly constricting circle of watchers made their hands unnecessary. Whirling about, desperate to find some way out of their scrutiny, Dana jumped into the first car she saw. In it sat Boyd R. Hargraves, a driver's education teacher, a quiet man in his fifties.

The shocked teacher stared at her, froze, put his foot down hard on the brake.

"Take me away!" Dana commanded him. At least, these were the words attributed to her by Mr. Hargraves when he was interviewed by a *Post* reporter later that day.

"It's the most shocking thing that's happened to me in my life," he said, basking in what was likely the only limelight he would ever know. "What do you say to a naked girl?"

She told him she wanted to be driven to where her friends were waiting in a car. Stunned and, therefore, malleable, Mr. Hargraves attempted to pull his car out of the parking lot. But in front of the car, behind it, and at every window pressed the excited faces, the sweaty palms of young boys. He couldn't move the car even a foot without running over a student.

Desperate, Dana jumped back out of the car and stood, angrily staring down the boys who surrounded her. They stared back at her. No one, it seemed, had any idea what to do.

Then a bell rang. The crowd began to break up. And Dana disappeared.

I have always wondered where she went. The getaway car that picked up the others had taken off long ago. Rumor had it that there was also a getaway car for the female runners, a gunning sedan at some appointed spot, just waiting to brim with breasts and hips.

Did she find it finally, taking off into the suburban streets in a sudden revving of engine and squealing of tires? Or did she somehow manage to flee into the neighborhood, unnoticed, darting from tree to phone pole, eventually stealing from an untended clothes line a flapping pair of jeans, an old shirt, in which to make her final and unnoted escape?

I have asked Dana herself, all of these many years later. And what I find most curious of all is that she doesn't remember. The story simply reaches a dead end. It's a blank. A whitewash. Nothing remains. No prompting or urging has been able to bring it back, to reveal the truth, and so I have stopped trying.

Over time, I have also conceded to starker truths that for a long while I had tried to ignore: that not every piece of the past can be resurrected, that not every riddle can be solved. Not every lost girl can be found. Not every friendship can be saved. One day, Sofia and I looked up at each other and saw something between us that had never been there before: distance. A spooling out of fragile thread that only rolled farther away the harder I tried to grab for it.

Sofia never again looked like the girl I had once known. I went off to college, and she did not. She moved to the rural Midwest, married, and had a daughter. Later, I would learn that she had named that daughter Melanie—a revelation that nearly broke my heart. What was it in me that she had thought fine enough, lovable enough, to make my name a fit choice for her firstborn child? Long ago Sofia had stopped answering the letters and emails I sent to her. We had corresponded for a time, and then she firmly closed that door. She let herself disappear into the ready anonymity that the vast world offered her. She went dark and cold as a neglected ember.

Sometimes I stalk that other Melanie. I have looked at photos of her on social media, always hoping for that one photo where she will pose beside her mother. I have not found one. Still, looking at this young woman, my namesake, is probably the closest I will ever come to reviving the friend I have lost. At times, clicking through her photos, I catch my breath at one of her smiles, at the knowing light in the green eyes so very like Sofia's. What happened to my friend that made that light go out? And had I missed the moment when I might have done something to stop it?

There comes a point in any remembering when one has to concede an impasse—when one must resign oneself to a mystery.

The story of Sofia I cannot change because I know a little too much of how it played out. But that other story—the story of a naked girl loose

and desperate on suburban streets—that one is open to me, is mine to craft  
in a way that saves the girl and gives her a happy ending. Not knowing any  
of the facts, I am free to tell myself a better tale:

The tale of Dana, the Brave—of Dana, the Unashamed. Not trying to  
make her body acceptable. Or different. Or desired. Not trying to hide it or  
to make it disappear. Just Dana, running like an Amazon, like a wild woman,  
through the staid and humdrum streets of Arlington.

Running not out of fear or shame, but instead, a primitive joy.

And as she flies along the blacktop, swift and unrepentant, no one is  
able to catch her.

A

R

T

## ARTIST STATEMENT

For the past thirty years I have divided my professional life between artwork and sustainable agriculture. The two mingle beneath the surface as I continue to sift through the remaining evidence of ancient worlds, trying to sense how people of lost cultures met basic survival needs and how they responded to the very human hunger for beauty, meaning, and story.

It's a revisiting of the remnants with empathy and wonder, scavenging for resonant clues and forks in the road that we didn't take, through the medium of paint. There is an implication of ritual in every image.

I think humans need ritual. We do it naturally. We are happy, our societies are healthy, and our ecosystems are not overtaxed when we devote our energy and creativity, attention and intentions to making simple and elaborate rituals around daily tasks and special events.

In other words, life feels stable and good when we are creating much of its meaning and beauty with our imaginations and little else.

This body of work, the various explorations of things archaic and mythic, composes a visual narrative which itself implies ritual: The Remnants and Residents of a Lost Sanctuary of Aphrodite. The following is a bit of historical context for these fresh echoes of perennial motifs.

A complete and elaborate sanctuary dedicated to a deity included the architectural elements, gardens, and groves surrounding a temple; an altar where offerings of valuable and edible items were placed (usually outdoors but in view of the deity's image); the temple itself, where some sort of representation of the deity could be easily seen; a room where practical daily tasks were carried out (such as preparing food for festival days); and a treasury room where the most precious objects left as offerings were kept safe (some were recognized as antiques even then).

—Laurie Goodhart, artist



*Aphrodite Calls To Pele*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2012, 36 x 24  
oil on canvas



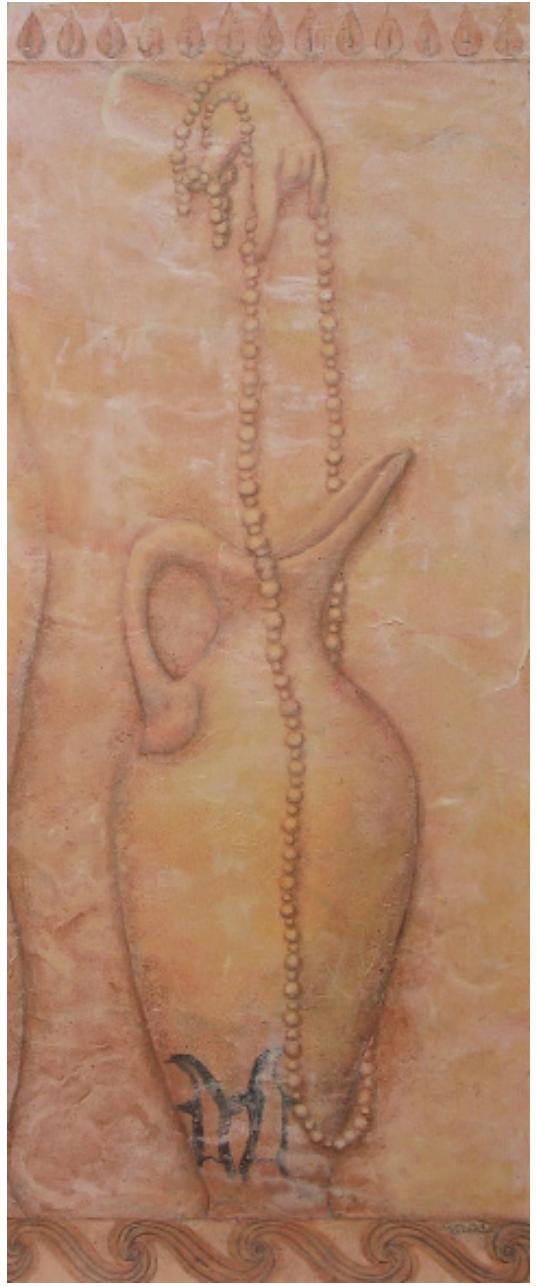
*Perirhanterion, Night Field*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2015, 40 x 30  
oil on canvas

28



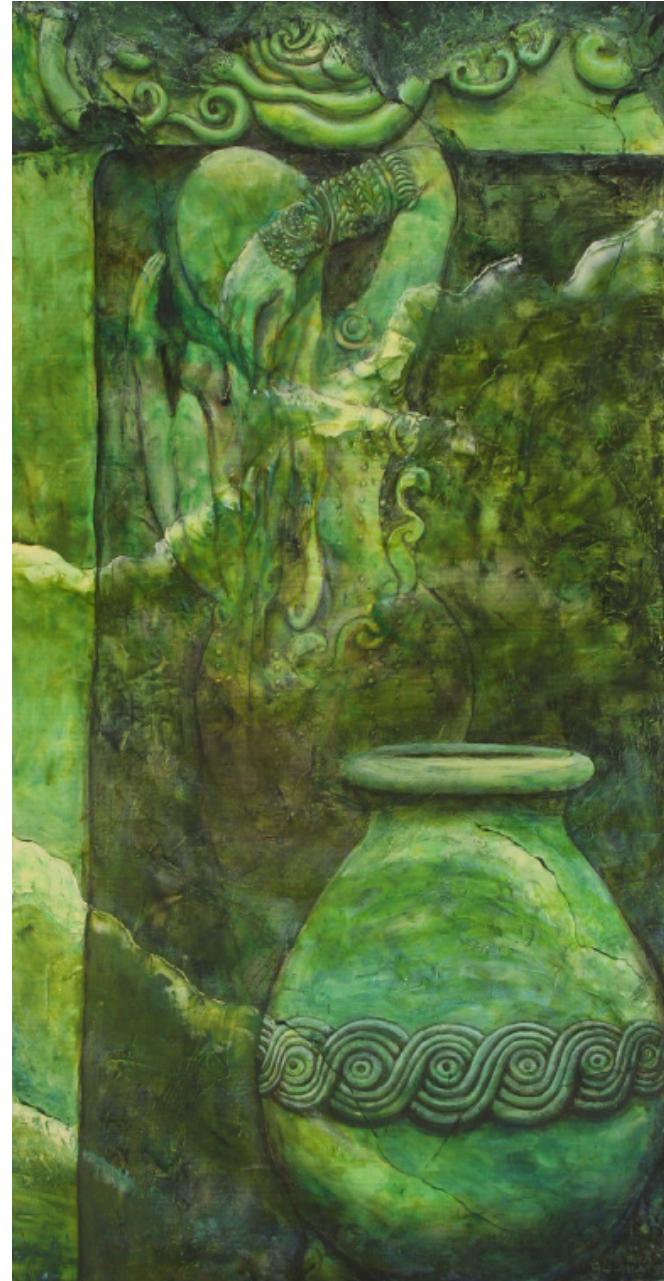
*Perirhanterion, Gamboge*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2015, 42 x 36  
oil on canvas

29



*Pink Pitcher With Penguins*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2015, 32 x 14  
oil on Arches oil paper mounted on board

30



*Water*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2009, 48 x 24  
oil on canvas

31



*Bronze Libation Vessel*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2016, 44 x 32  
oil on canvas

32



*Terpsichore*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2014, 9 x 12  
embossed paper

33



*White Vessel With Dancing Figures*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2008, 30 x 40  
oil on canvas

34



*Three Greek Vases*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2015, 24 x 30  
oil on canvas

35

F  
I  
C  
T  
I  
O  
N



*Small Figure Beholds Aphrodite*  
Laurie Goodhart  
2016, 60 x 36  
oil on canvas

# THE AIR WAS NOT SOFT ENOUGH

JA Field

The baby is strapped to a stainless steel tray. It's raised almost to eye level and angled so sharply she's practically vertical. Electrodes encircle her head like a crown. Her arms are pinioned straight out from her sides. Her legs are a wishbone. Although Carol's been told there's a problem with her temperature, she's naked, a square of cotton tucked under her bottom to absorb any fluids. Her skin mottles under the overhead lamp. The doctors say her central nervous system is devastated—not compromised, devastated. Not even her eyes behind her eyelids move. Two and a half weeks old, she was born prematurely and home only a few days before—this.

Carol looks at the baby and sighs. She knows she should be angry with the parents, but she's not. She understands how this terrible thing—this terrible, human thing—could have happened. She imagines the baby crying, crying, crying, and the father—probably the father—pacing in a cluttered room with her against his shoulder. The tension in his arms grows as he pats the baby's back. The baby's cries undulate in the small space. He puts the baby down in her crib, covers her with her blanket. He turns away, he pushes aside a pile of laundry and sits on the couch, he reaches under an end table, he picks up the remote, he turns on the TV. His right leg pumps up and down, up and down. The baby's cries siren through the room. He tries to focus on the TV. The baby cries. He puts his hands over his ears. She cries. His leg pumps faster, faster, up and down, up and down, faster, faster. All at once he shoots up from the couch, lunges toward the crib, scoops up the baby in both hands. The blanket billows out from where it is caught in the crook of his finger. He holds her inches from his face, screams *Shut up!* and gives her a few fast hard shakes. Her too-heavy head rocks wildly on her wiggly Jello of a neck, her brain a juicy peach thrown against a brick wall.

Carol feels sorry for the baby, so sorry for her. A second—a fraction of a second—has ruined her life. The parents' lives are ruined, too, and nothing Carol is going to do is going to help. She doesn't want a broken baby case—broken baby cases took over your caseload—but she's resigned to it. When her supervisor briefed her and told her to head to the hospital, she didn't ask any questions, just canceled her other visits and left. She's been with the agency for nineteen years. She's been through nine supervisors, ten managers, four directors, and three governors, and she knows that no matter what new policies are issued, she is going to have to deal with cases like this. She didn't even need to put the hospital's address in her GPS.

Carol wonders about the parents. She wonders if they're clean, or if they smell like cigarettes or fried food or weed or—the worst—hygiene issues. She wonders if they'll yell and swear at her and the hospital staff. She wonders if they even remember that she's coming, that they were told

last night that their long-term social worker would meet them at the hospital today. She imagines they are still in shock, still not able to grasp what's happened. She imagines they don't even know yet that their lives are ruined.

\*

Carol finds the parents in a small waiting area, sitting next to each other in green vinyl chairs, both wearing jeans and hoodies and looking relatively clean, no smell. He's leaning back, eyes closed, the brim of a Yankees cap sheltering his face. She's leaning forward, holding her phone. Their knees are touching. "Hi, I'm Carol from Social Services, I'm your social worker."

He's nearest and she reaches out to shake his hand. He looks up at her from under his hat and doesn't move. His wife or girlfriend, Carol doesn't know which, says, "I'm Sheila and this is Dan." She stands up, takes Carol's hand. "Sorry. It was a long night."

"Waiting is hard. Have they been updating you on the baby, how she's doing?"

"They're not telling us nothing," he says. "They won't even let us see her. Said *you* had to give permission first." He's still reclining, still looking up at her.

"That's because the state has custody now," Carol says. "The ESWs—the emergency social workers—told you that last night, right?"

Dan's eyes slide away. Sheila gives a barely perceptible nod.

"The hospital will look to us to make decisions. But I'll let them know that they can talk to you, keep you updated. And in just a few minutes we're all going to meet with the doctors and you'll have a chance to hear what's been happening and ask any questions you have."

"When can we see her?" Sheila asks.

"I'm going to have to find out more from the doctors before I can tell you that. I haven't had a chance to talk to them yet. I did peek in at your daughter though. She's beautiful! A preemie, right?" She wants to hear Sheila talk about her baby.

"She was four and a half weeks early. My water broke at Dunkin' Donuts while we were standing in line to get a coffee! Dan called 911 and . . ." She launches into her labor and delivery story. She sounds proud and excited. They are so young—early twenties, Carol guesses. She considers taking them in to see the baby—she doesn't really need to talk to the doctors first—but decides to wait. Things may play out so that only Sheila is here later. Dan may get angry—he's halfway there already—and get thrown out of the hospital, or walk out. If he's the one who did it, the sooner he's out of the picture and she can focus on Sheila, the better.

When Sheila is finished, Carol leads them to a conference room. One of the hospital social workers is there, and Marylou, the consulting nurse

for Carol's agency, and Beth, one of the ESWs who was called out the night before. Carol wonders whether Beth had a reason to come back to the hospital today, or is just there to suck up the drama. Some of the ESWs are like that, they thrive on the drama. Carol does not thrive on the drama. Carol would prefer to be back in the office, writing a report at her desk.

Two doctors from the hospital's child protection team come into the meeting and describe in clinical detail what happened to the baby. They repeat the words "non-accidental trauma" frequently. Carol knows from experience that the hospital staff will not be sympathetic to the parents. During the meeting, neither doctor offers a single word of compassion to Sheila or Dan. The hospital social worker says nothing; her role will be to liaison with Carol and Carol's agency, not to assist or advocate for the parents in any way. The hospital staff holds the parents responsible, of course, and they're angry and appalled. Everyone the parents meet over the next few years, Carol suspects, will react the same way.

Sheila asks the question Carol knew she would ask: Isn't it possible that there's some other explanation, some explanation other than one of us did this? She was premature, she had some problems after she was born, they had to keep her in the hospital for a while, couldn't there be some kind of medical issue no one knew she had? No, the doctors tell her. No. It's very clear from the MRI that she sustained a non-accidental injury, that there was trauma to her brain, and to her ribs.

"Well I know we didn't do this," Sheila says. No one responds. "I know I didn't do it, and I know Dan didn't do it. I know him. He's not capable of this." Her face turns red. Her voice is too loud in the room.

"Someone did this!" Beth suddenly says. "Someone did this to your baby!"

The doctors shuffle their papers, the hospital social worker gives Carol her card, the three of them leave the room. Beth turns back to Sheila. "Someone hurt your baby! Why aren't you angry? If someone did this to my baby, I'd be angry!"

This is not the way Carol wants to begin. She doesn't want to confront Sheila and Dan with outrage, and she doesn't want to play good cop bad cop with Beth, to try to get one of them to confess, if that's what Beth is trying to set up—that would just create more drama. Instead Carol asks Beth if she needs any more information from Dan for her report. Beth jumps on the chance to interrogate him again, and Carol suggests she take him back to the waiting area while she fills Sheila in on next steps. Sheila's eyes linger on Dan as he and Beth leave the room.

"Sheila," Carol begins in her gentlest, kindest, best social worker voice, "if you know you didn't do this, then you know you are the safe parent for your daughter. When she's ready to be discharged, the agency will place her in a foster home unless we believe she'll be safe at home. And we won't believe she'll be safe at home until we know what happened and we know it won't happen again. Do you understand?"

"You think we did something terrible to our baby! You think we're bad people!"

"I don't think either of you are bad people, Sheila. There wouldn't be so many warnings about Shaken Baby if it wasn't something that people are at risk to do. I think one of you got very frustrated and did something you regret, probably because you wanted to take good care of your baby and tried everything you could think of, and still she wouldn't stop crying. But if it wasn't you who did that, then you know you can be the safe parent she can go home to."

"And not Dan, is that what you're saying? You want me to say he did it!" She is sobbing, gulping. "No. No. I know I didn't do this and I know Dan didn't do this! We're good people! We love our baby!"

"Sheila, there is no way that she is going to go home if we don't know what happened. If you know you didn't do it, then don't you want your baby to come home to you?"

"You want me to kick him out so she can come home instead of going to foster care!"

"You need to put your baby first, Sheila. You need to put her before your boyfriend."

"Husband. Dan is my husband. We're a family!"

Not anymore, Carol thinks.

\*

Carol brings Sheila and Dan to see the baby before they leave. She wants to get the supervised visit for the week done, so she doesn't have to drive out to the hospital again, and they haven't seen her since she was wheeled out of the pediatrician's office into the ambulance.

Dan takes quick peeks at her from under his hat. Sheila makes a sound like a skipped heartbeat. She asks why the baby is naked, and Carol reminds her that the doctors told them she can no longer regulate her temperature and that the lamp over her is actually a heater.

"She needs to be covered," Sheila says, her voice catching. She reaches out with one finger to stroke the baby's foot. When Dan makes to do the same, Carol says sharply, "No touching," and they both pull their hands back and stick them into the pockets of their hoodies.

\*

It's late afternoon by the time Carol drives away from the hospital. She's tired and she's a long way from home. She thinks about dinner, the stew she started in the slow cooker that morning, the savory smell that will welcome her when she opens her door. Sitting in traffic, she closes her eyes for a second and breathes that good smell in. Some of her coworkers need

to go to the gym after work; some of them need to go for a drink; she needs to go home to a good meal. Every Sunday she plans her menu and does her shopping for the week. She's glad she has only her own tastes to cater to. When she gets home tonight, she'll pop a partially-cooked roll from the freezer into the oven. A warm roll with butter, dipped into the thick broth of the stew, she's smiling just thinking about it. Afterwards she'll crawl into bed with the book she's reading, the latest in a series of mysteries set in the National Parks. In the book, all the questions will get answered in the end.

\*

In meeting after meeting, Carol has to tell the story of how the baby became involved with the agency: Mom came home from work and noticed the baby was having trouble breathing and brought her to the pediatrician. The pediatrician took one look at her and called an ambulance. The ambulance took her to the local hospital. The local hospital put her on oxygen and sent her to the level one trauma center in the city. The trauma center performed an MRI and found the subdural hemorrhage, the retinal bleeding, the posterior rib fracture. Carol has to describe, over and over again, the baby's condition—the amount of weight she is losing, her too-low body temperature, the number of seizures she has each minute. The story indwells in Carol. At night she wakes to it playing in her head.

Everyone wants something from her. The agency's attorney wants her in court. The parents want information they're not getting from the hospital. Her supervisor wants her to finish her reports. Workers stop by her desk or stop her in the hall to ask how the baby is doing. Every time Carol hangs up her phone, it rings again.

Carol is in constant communication with Marylou. Every time the baby needs to have something done, the hospital calls her, and she calls Marylou. The baby opens her eyes, but the doctors are not sure whether she can see. The hospital informs Carol and Carol informs Marylou. The baby gurgles. The hospital nurses try to feed her from a bottle, but her sucking reflex is gone. They keep trying to get it back. Carol wonders if this is really possible, but she doesn't ask the hospital nurses or Marylou. After consulting with Marylou, she gives permission for the baby to have an NG tube; and then, when the baby continues to lose weight, a G tube. All the medical people—the hospital staff and Marylou—are sad about the G tube. Carol does not ask Marylou about this either. If she spends any more time talking to people, she'll never get anything done.

The agency's director arranges for an outside consultant to come into the office to offer support to everyone who's been involved with the baby. The consultant invites them all to a meeting. Carol doesn't plan to go. She's too busy, and besides, she doesn't like outside consultants—none of the workers do. They don't know what they're talking about. They don't understand the system. They've never removed a child.

When it's time for the meeting, Carol's supervisor comes and gets her. "Ready?" Lisa asks, and Carol can't say no. In the conference room, the consultant has pushed back the table and arranged the chairs in a circle. Beth is sitting in one of them. The consultant stands at the door in her power

suit, introducing herself to each person who comes in. The other ESW, Bob, is standing behind the consultant; he makes eye contact with Carol and rolls his eyes. Bob has worked for the agency as long as she has. Carol sits where she can see the clock. She nudges her chair back a few inches from the circle.

"Thank you all for coming to this meeting," the consultant begins. "When something like this happens, when we are exposed to something terrible that's happened to a child, it's important to take time out of our busy schedules and talk with others who share that experience. Talking and sharing help us process our feelings. We all know about secondary trauma and how it can impact us, and our goal here today is to help each other lessen that impact."

"Excuse me," Beth says, "something terrible didn't *happen* to a child. Somebody *did* something terrible to a child."

"Yes, and that complicates the secondary trauma, doesn't it? But let's start at the beginning. Let's go around the circle and have everyone describe their role in the case." Everyone around the circle already knows everyone's role in the case, but they spend twenty minutes explaining it to the consultant.

The consultant notes that Bob was the first one to see the baby and asks what that was like for him.

"Well," Bob says, "she looked like she was nailed to the cross, the way they had her strung up on that tray. I didn't find out 'til later that they were keeping her upright like that to help with her circulation, so . . . yeah, it was a shock, to walk in and see her like that." Carol closes her eyes, sees the baby, her vacant body, her wiry crown.

"Yes, shock is a good word to describe our reaction. It *shocks* us to witness these events. Bob, tell us, have you found yourself experiencing any of the symptoms of secondary trauma since your involvement with the baby?"

"Such as?"

"Intrusive thoughts and memories, detachment, emotional exhaustion, poor concentration, illness, fearfulness, anger, shame . . ."

"No, no, none of those." He sits up straighter, replants his feet. "I've done this job a long time." The consultant moves on, and Bob looks at Carol. He tightens his mouth, shakes his head. He looks down, back up at Carol. He takes a breath. His mouth sags.

Carol remembers that when they were in training Bob always volunteered for the roleplays everyone hated, and always brought an extra cup of coffee in the morning in case someone hadn't had time to get theirs. She's worked on only a few cases with him in all the years since then and doesn't know much more about him. She knows he has a dog, a barrel-chested black Lab he's brought into the office. Carol sees his hand on the dog's back, sees his fingers burrowed in her thick fur.

\*

Sheila and Dan live in a brick building between a 7-Eleven and a gas station. The security door in the lobby is broken—the lock has been popped out. The elevator is broken too, but Carol wouldn't use it anyway. She walks up four flights of sticky stairs. The parents' one room apartment is in the middle of the hallway, squeezed between the full-sized apartments at either end. The apartment smells like Lysol. There's a full-sized mattress on the floor, a TV on a kitchen chair, and the baby's crib. Dan sits on the mattress, back against the wall, legs stretched out, eyes on the TV. Sheila and Carol stand. Carol hands them each a copy of their action plan.

"These are the things you need to do to show you can take care of your baby and keep her safe," she tells them. They begin reading.

"What's anger management?" Sheila asks.

"A program, a class, where you learn positive things to do when you feel angry, like taking a walk or calling a friend."

"Therapy?" Dan says, "I have to go to *therapy*?"

"Can we go together?" Sheila asks quickly.

"No, you need to go individually. We need to know that each of you is making progress on your own."

Sheila takes a deep breath, lets it out. "So, if we do all these things, you'll give her back to us?"

"If you do all these things, we will think it's safer for her to come home," Carol says, "but we still need to know what happened first."

"We're never getting her back," Dan says. He tosses the action plan across the bed, gets up, goes out. The door slams.

\*

Back in the office, Carol eats lunch at her desk. Her co-workers are all out, and her phone has stopped ringing. She's munching on a carrot stick when she has a sudden memory of French Fry Girl. She's surprised she remembers her, she had her case so long ago. She sees her, ten years old, very skinny, skin all red and flaky, bouncing lightly on her hands and knees on her hospital bed while she watches a cartoon on TV. She had a medical condition—Carol can't recall what—that caused her skin problems, her significant delays, and her inability to gain weight. One of the last times Carol saw her, she was in the hospital to get a G tube. She understood, to some extent, what was going to happen, and she was heartbroken—truly heartbroken—because she wasn't ever going to be able to eat french fries again. Carol, new at the job, unnerved, had patted her awkwardly on the shoulder while she sobbed, "No mo' french! No mo' french!" Carol wonders what happened to her, where she ended up. She looks around at the empty desks, starts to get up to go find someone who might know, then sits back down. She has so much to do and she's already wasted time eating lunch.

\*

Every week Carol goes to the hospital and supervises a one-hour visit between the parents and the baby. The first three weeks, Sheila and Dan stand beside the stainless steel contraption they have learned is an infant warmer and look at the baby while Carol watches from a chair. After the baby opens her eyes, Carol holds her during the visits, and Sheila talks to her. She tells her about the sunny day outside, the happy pictures on the walls, the sights she saw on the way to the hospital. She hasn't tried to touch the baby again. After the NG tube goes in, Sheila tells the baby how beautiful she is, how strong. She encourages her to keep trying to eat from the bottle so that she will grow and get stronger. Sometimes Dan's eyes fill during the visits, sometimes he looks out the window. He doesn't talk to the baby.

The day before the G tube is to be inserted, Sheila arrives for the visit with new clothes for the baby. She sits beside Carol while Carol holds the baby, the pastel outfits laid across her lap. She leans across the arms of the chairs to smile at her daughter. Carol lifts up the baby and, carefully supporting her head, offers her to Sheila. Sheila draws in her breath, whispers *Thank you*. Carol has no concrete reason to do this today. Maybe she thinks it's the right time. Maybe she is just tired of holding the baby. She suggests Sheila dress her in one of her new outfits, and Sheila carries her over to the warmer and lays her on the tray, horizontal now her circulation's improved. Dan follows her. The couple stands close together, bent over the baby. Dan murmurs to her, hums a little song. Sheila takes his hand and squeezes it. She dresses the baby.

\*

On her way home that night, Carol tries to think about dinner, but instead she thinks about Sugar. He was one of her very first cases, and she's never forgotten him. At eight years old, Sugar was so fat he could barely walk, so fat he could barely breathe. He had severe sleep apnea, and his mother wouldn't make him use his CPAP machine because he liked to snack when he woke up at night. She could not understand the very real risk of Sugar having a stroke, so the agency took custody. Sugar was his mother's darling—she had given him the nickname—and whenever she came to the office for a visit, she brought him all his favorite foods: extra cheese and sausage pizzas with milkshakes, double bacon cheeseburgers and root beer floats, nachos loaded with guacamole and sour cream, chocolate-frosted brownies, steak bombs, chicken fingers, ice cream.

At first Carol tried allowing Sugar (she made a point of calling him by his name, Freddie, when she was with him, but he remained Sugar in her mind) a taste of what his mother had brought him. But this quickly devolved into him down on his knees in the visit room, begging and pleading for just one more bite, oh please he was so hungry, the foster parents were starving him, they hadn't given him a single thing to eat all week. Then Carol said no food at visits except fruits and vegetables. His mother would still try to sneak in his favorites, and looked grief-stricken when Carol found them and told her to take them out to the car. Then she'd return with chocolate covered strawberries and cream cheese filled celery sticks. Finally Carol said no food at visits at all, and discovered that mother and son had no idea what to do with each other when there wasn't food to pass between them.

Carol knew what happened to Sugar—he went home. And back to foster care, and back home, and back to foster care. His mother got really good at keeping to his calorie count when she was working to get him home, but as soon as he was there they'd slip back into their old habits. He'd made a good connection with the foster parents he was originally placed with, though, and was always able to return to them whenever he came back into care.

Sugar was a popular kid in the office, and Carol went along with a group of other workers to visit him at the hospital when he became the youngest person in the state ever to have gastric bypass surgery. His mother was there in his room when they all arrived, and right in front of Sugar on the bed tray was a big decorated cake that said, "Get Well Soon, Sugar!"

Thinking about Sugar makes Carol laugh. But then she gets a funny feeling in her stomach, and when she gets home, she crawls right into bed. She doesn't want dinner. She doesn't want to read. She just wants to sleep. During the night she wakes to images of thickly frosted cakes and wilted french fries and too-still babies. She pulls a pillow tight against her stomach and curls around it. The space around her feels too big. She wishes she could hear someone breathing.

\*

When the hospital tells Carol the baby is almost ready for discharge, Carol tells her supervisor.

"Mom hasn't thrown Dad out yet?" Lisa asks.

"No. She seems really connected to him."

"Their attorneys are probably telling them to stick together, too. The DA is investigating. They probably think foster care for the baby is better than jail for one of them."

"I think Sheila is still hoping that the baby will come home and they can all be a family."

"Well, that's not going to happen. How are you doing with all this, Carol?"

"How am I doing?

"Yeah, is this case bringing things up for you, like that consultant said? I know this is not your first difficult case, but . . . I thought I should check in, see if you need more support."

"I'm fine, Lisa. Is that it? I've got visits scheduled."

"That's it. Keep up the good work, Carol."

\*

Marylou identifies a medical foster home for the baby. Carol goes to the hospital to meet the foster mother and discharge the baby to her care. While she's waiting, she wanders. Walking past one of the play rooms, she sees a woman in a hijab helping a toddler go down a small plastic slide. Their mood is somber; the woman helps the toddler silently, and the toddler moves stiffly. Carol has to walk quickly away. She is reminded of Amal. Amal! She had forgotten about Amal. How could she have forgotten about Amal?

Amal was here, in this same hospital. Not on this wing, but on another wing. Not on this floor, but on another floor. She remembers. She doesn't want to remember.

A nurse reported Amal's parents to the agency because they let him ride a Big Wheel. Someone who didn't really understand had given it to him as a present, and one of Amal's parents had put him on it and given it a little push. Amal let out a gleeful shout, and the nurse came running in time to see him pushing against the floor with his bandaged hands and feet, trying to make it go.

Amal's parents shouldn't have allowed him to ride the Big Wheel because every inch of Amal's skin was as evanescent as wet tissue paper. He had EB, epidermolysis bullosa, and the air was not soft enough to come in contact with him. Carol had never heard of EB before the day she first saw Amal, sitting up in his hospital bed, most of his arms, legs, and what was left of his hands and feet wrapped in gauze, red patches bright as burns scattered across the exposed areas. She stalled at his door, and he turned his head and smiled at her.

Amal was five years old, very small due to his illness, dark haired and dark eyed, a refugee from Iraq brought to the United States with his family for medical treatment. He was bright and happy and wanted to go to school. One of the words he knew in English was "friend."

Carol wonders who she can ask about what happened to Amal.

No. She won't ask.

\*

Carol decides to get a dog. She's having more trouble sleeping and thinks a warm body next to her will help. She goes to the shelter and chooses a small mixed breed with black spots. Every night for a week she puts the dog on the bed, climbs in, pulls him close to her, and spoons around him. The dog stays absolutely still for one minute, then slowly raises itself up and tiptoes over to the smooth side of the bed, where it curls into a sleek little ball. Carol is patient at first; she scoots up so she can use both hands, reaches over, cups him, and carefully pulls him back toward her, making soothing sounds. She cozies herself around him again; he's absolutely still for one minute; he slowly rises and moves to the other side of the bed. Every time the dog curls up away from her, Carol feels a pulse of anger. One night, when the dog is mid-curl, she slams her fist deep into the mattress beside him. He whimpers and shakes. Carol turns her back to him. The next day, she returns him to the shelter.

Carol doesn't tell anyone at work about the dog. She continues to do her visits, write her reports, answer her phone calls, and eat lunch at her desk, but sometimes, right in the middle of typing up a note or listening to someone, she hears a noise like the ding of a bell, and that painting *The Scream* appears in her head like a pop-up on a computer.

\*

On a Saturday Carol decides to drive into the city. She's not sure what she'll do when she gets there, maybe go to her favorite bookstore, maybe have lunch. It's been a long time since she's hung out in the city, it'll be good for her to just go and see what's new. In the back of her mind, she knows what she's doing. She knows she's going to the hospital, even though it's a Saturday and the baby is no longer there. She puts on jeans and a hoodie and gets in the car.

When she gets there, she sits in the lobby for a while and watches the people coming in through the revolving doors. A middle-aged man with a black pseudo-leather coat buttoned tight across his belly comes in leading a boy by the hand. They go over to the desk, confer with the receptionist, and head for the elevators. A tall woman in a white cable-knit sweater arrives; she has trouble navigating the door and spills some of the coffee she is holding down the leg of her skin-tight pink pants. She rubs at the stain with the heel of her hand, shrugs, and heads off down a corridor. A couple comes in with balloons; they laugh when they discover that one is still bobbing outside when they are in, its string threaded through the door. The balloons are blue and say, "It's a Boy!" They press the button for the eighth floor, maternity.

Carol gets up. She will go to the cafeteria, she will have soup and crackers for lunch, and then she will go home. She will make a nice dinner, she will read her book. She goes over to consult the directory to double-check which floor the cafeteria is on. There is a map of the hospital. She searches for the cafeteria. It takes her a long time, because she is also searching for Amal's room.

Carol gets on the elevator and presses the button for the sixth floor, cafeteria. But when someone gets off on the fourth floor, Carol gets off too. She isn't sure, she doesn't remember, but this might be the floor Amal's room was on. She peeks into rooms. She sees children with their families, she sees children lying alone in the dark. She does not see anything that reminds her of Amal. When a nurse asks who she is looking for, she says she is on the wrong floor and gets back on the elevator.

On the fifth floor, Carol sees something she thinks she remembers, a painting of flowers stretching across one wall, the petals the faces of children. Did she see this when she came to see Amal? She walks slowly down the hall, hoping for a hazy memory of where to turn for Amal's room. She thinks she gets it. She stops in a doorway. She looks in. There is a child on the bed. He turns and looks at her. She smiles. He looks at her blankly, then turns away. Carol continues to stand there, looking into the room, until someone comes and lays a hand gently on her shoulder.

"Can I help you?"

Carol turns. The woman is not a nurse—she isn't wearing scrubs—but there is a hospital ID hanging from a lanyard around her neck.

"What do you do here?" Carol asks.

"I'm one of the hospital social workers."

Carol snorts. "No, you can't help me." She turns back toward the room.

"Are you looking for someone?"

"Not anyone I'm going to find."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

She turns toward the woman again. "I don't know what happened to him."

"A child?"

"He was a child when I knew him. Here. But he'd be . . . older, now."

"Are you a nurse? Did you work here?"

"No. I'm—I'm a social worker, too. I work for Social Services."

"Oh! I'm Sandy, would you like to come back to my office and talk? Maybe we can find someone who knows the child you're looking for—"

Carol's stomach lurches. "No. No, I'm sorry to take up your time. I have to go now. Thank you." She hurries away. Once she is out of sight, she leans against a wall. She wants to slide to the floor and never get up again. She wants to go into one of the empty rooms and get under the clean white sheets of the bed and have the nurses take care of her. She wants to get on her knees and beseech everyone who comes by to help them all. She closes her eyes and breathes. When she hears footsteps coming, she makes herself walk to the elevator and go back down to the lobby. Keeping her head down, she walks until she comes to an empty chair and sinks into it. She closes her eyes again. She sits for a long time before she is able to get up and go home.

\*

On Monday morning, Carol comes into work and finds a message from Sheila asking her to call. She told Dan to move out, the message says, and she wants to talk. Before Carol calls her back, she calls Marylou. When Marylou answers, Carol stumbles over the words, but she's able to get them out. She asks Marylou if she remembers Amal.

"Of course I remember Amal! Great kid, who could forget him?"

"Marylou, do you know . . . do you know what happened to him?"

"You were his worker, weren't you Carol? How long did you have that case?"

Carol manages to talk past the clog in her throat. "Not long. The family moved and the case transferred."

"I see. Well. Are you sure you want to know what happened?"

"Yes," she whispers.

"He died, Carol. He died not long after his sixth birthday."

Carol feels the hot tears behind her eyes. "Did he . . . did he ever get to go to school?"

"Yes! He went into one of the pediatric care facilities and was able to go to school on site. He was very excited!"

Carol smiles. She blinks and the tears fall. She is able to thank Marylou and reassure her that she is alright. When she hangs up, she sees that Bob is standing beside her desk, an expression of concern and alarm on his face. He raises his eyebrows in a question, and Carol thinks she will tell him.

Then she'll call Sheila.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Nina Bennett**'s poetry has appeared in journals such as *Open Minds Quarterly*, *The Bellevue Literary Review*, and *CALYX*. She has published a chapbook, *Lithium Witness*, and a full-length collection, *These Acts of Water*. She is Professor of English and department chairperson at New York City College of Technology, CUNY.

A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, **Lana Bella** is author of three chapbooks, *Under My Dark* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2016), *Adagio* (Finishing Line Press, 2016), and *Dear Suki: Letters* (Platypus 2412 Mini Chapbook Series, 2016), and has had poetry and fiction featured in over 350 journals, including *2River*, *California Quarterly*, *Chiron Review*, and *Columbia Journal*, among others. She resides in the US and the coastal town of Nha Trang, Vietnam, where she is a mom of two far-too-clever frolicsome imps.

**JA Field**'s poetry has been published in *Common Ground Review* and *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change*. Short stories will appear in upcoming issues of *Bird's Thumb* and *Spry*.

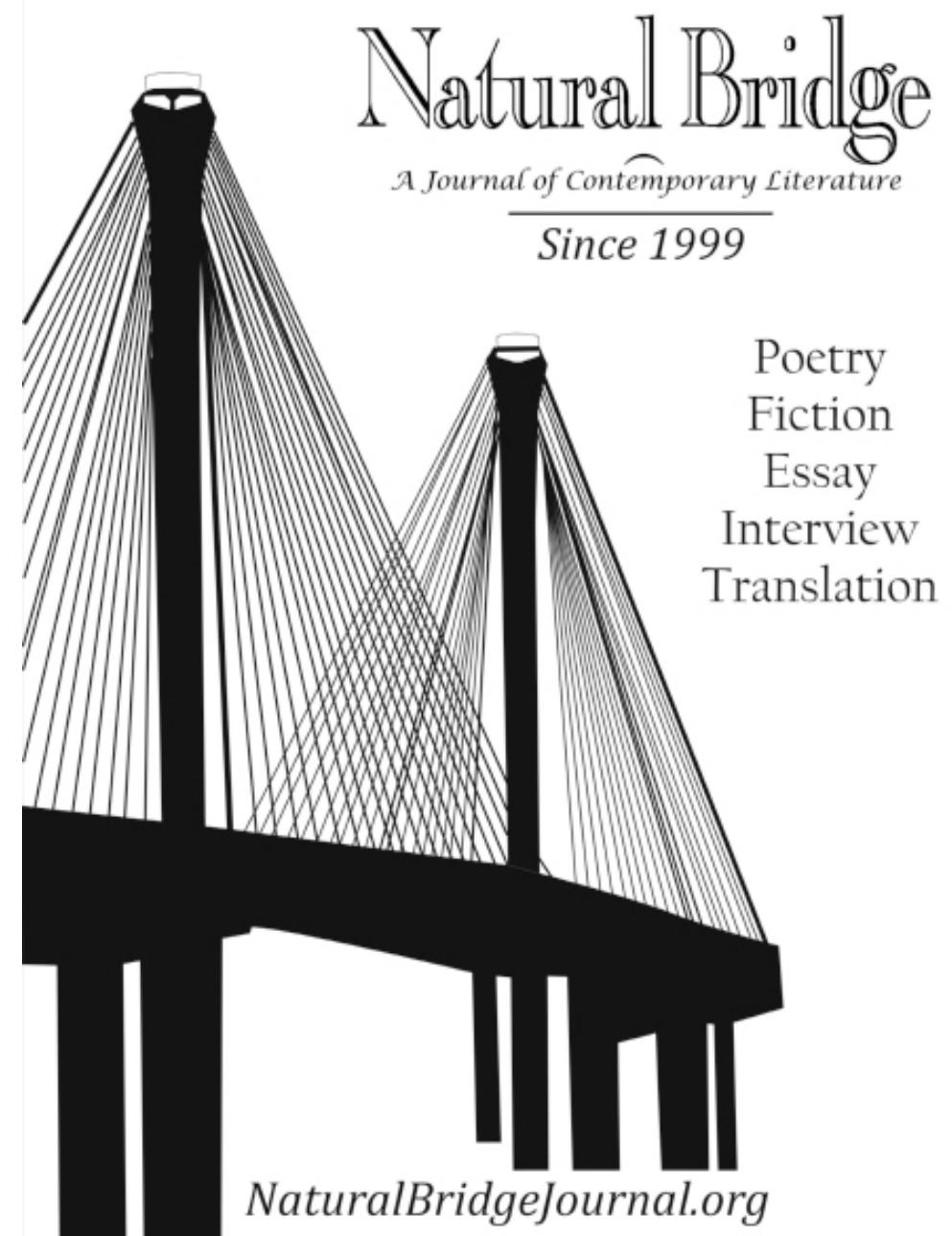
**Susan Flynn** has been published in *Late Peaches, An Anthology of Sacramento Poets*; *No Achilles, An Anthology of War Poetry*; *Tule Review*; *Oberon Poetry Magazine*; *Cosumnes River Journal*; and is soon to be published in *Slab*. She is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Sacramento and a university professor at UC Davis. She enjoys fly-fishing, kayaking, photography, and writing poetry.

For 35 years **Laurie Goodhart** has dedicated her professional life to both artwork and organic farming. Recently returned to her native upstate New York, she is currently in production of an illustrated volume combining the two, *Sustenance For A Wild Woman*.

Featured on NPR's *Snap Judgment*, **Mary Chi-Whi Kim** has published in *The New York Times Magazine*. Her chapbook, *Silken Purse*, received publication by Pudding House Press, while her multi-genre *Karma Suture* garnered Honorable Mention in 2007's *Writer's Digest International Self-Published Books Contest*. She teaches in Savannah, Georgia.

**Melanie McCabe** is the author of *His Other Life: Searching For My Father, His First Wife, and Tennessee Williams*, to be published this fall by the University of New Orleans Press. She is also the author of two poetry collections: *History of the Body* (David Robert Books, 2012), and *What The Neighbors Know* (FutureCycle Press, 2014). Her work has appeared in *Shenandoah*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Best New Poets*, and numerous other journals.

**Tara Stringfellow** is a poet and an attorney living in Chicago, originally from Memphis and Okinawa. *More than Dancing*, her first poetry collection, was published in 2008. Her poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *Jet Fuel Review*, *Transitions Magazine*, *Apogee Journal*, *Linden Avenue Literary Journal*, *Chicago Magazine*, *decomp*, *Voice and Vision*, and *Prompt*. Currently, she is an MFA candidate for both poetry and prose at Northwestern University.





*WomenArts Quarterly Journal* Subscription Form

Individual

- One Year \$30
- Two Years \$50
- Three Years \$80

Institutional

- One Year \$45
- Two Years \$65
- Three Years \$95

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

I have enclosed a check

Make checks payable to:

*WomenArts Quarterly Journal*  
University of Missouri-St. Louis  
One University Blvd  
153 JC Penney Building  
St. Louis, MO 63121  
314-516-4990  
[wia@umsl.edu](mailto:wia@umsl.edu)

I authorize my credit card to be charged

Billing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Payment Method: Visa \_\_\_\_\_ MasterCard \_\_\_\_\_ Acct # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ Name on Card: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_